Stories by Korolenko

Simple Beauty and Elusive Charm in Five Tales by Modern Russian Author

STORIES BY VLADIMIR KOROLENKO. Translated by Clarence Augustus Manning. Duffield & Co., New York.

Of all the well known Russian authors Korolenko is perhaps the most elusive, the least tangible in his appeal. He does not possess either the broad, exuberant humor of Gogol or the finely wrought art of Turgeniev. He never achieves the tremendous psychopathic effects of Dostoievsky, and, unlike most of the modern Russian writers, he seldom draws his material from the surging waves of the contemporary revolutionary movement. And yet, even through the necessarily imperfect medium of a translation, it is possible to appreciate in his tales a rare quality of wistful, haunting beauty.

The present volume includes two rather long stories, "Birds of Heaven" and "Isn't It Terrible?" and three shorter sketches, "Necessity," "On the Volga" and "The Village of God." The principal figure in "Birds of Heaven" is a familiar Russian type, wayward and passionate, a monk turned wanderer and drunkard. Along with his outbursts of boisterous gayety there is always an element of deep, brooding, hopeless sadness, of poignant grief, that only a Slavic writer can adequately express.

"Birds of Heaven" is primarily a character portrait; "Isn't It Terrible?" is a story with a more complicated interplay of conflicting passions and emotions. Told by a spectator in a sketchy, fragmentary style that suggests Conrad's "Lord Jim," it unfolds a tale characterized by a curious mixture of sordidness and pathos. Sometimes the interest inherent in the story is diverted to the narrator, who reveals himself as a man whose best impulses and ideals have been crushed under the blighting tyranny of the Russian bureaucracy. In his life, to use his own language, "everything was incomplete, accidental, disconnected, senseless and disgusting."

The tranquil beauty of Korolenko's style is exemplified in "On the Volga." Although it is only a simple story of the discussion of some travelers on a steamboat going up the great Russian river, it is permeated throughout with the most delicate, exquisite art. There is rich poetic eloquence in this image of the river at night:

"A block creaked at the bow, the light of a golden star flew to the top of the mast; the waves splashed somewhere in the distance; the distant whistle of an almost invisible steamboat reëchoed above the sleeping river. In the sky the bright stars appeared one after the other, and the blue night hung noiselessly above the meadows, the mountains and the ravines of the Volga.

"The earth seemed to be sadly asking some question, but the heavens remained silent with its quiet and its mystery."

This passage illustrates two distinctive qualities of Korolenko's writing; his warm love and appreciation of natural beauty and his mystical attitude toward life, an attitude always tinged with Oriental sadness and fatalism. Korolenko is a modest writer; he makes no special claim to be considered an interpreter of the soul of his people; but in this ardent love of simple beauty, in this melancholy, yet resigned philosophy of life, he expresses the true spirit of the Russian peasant better than many more self-conscious spokesmen of the masses.

"Necessity" is an argument, couched in the form of an Oriental fable, against shifting responsibility for all human actions upon some blind fate; and "The Village of God" is a series of reflections inspired by a hillside where many participants in a medieval peasants' uprising had been executed. Both are inconsequential in theme; but both reveal the simplicity, the tenderness, the fine literary art that invest all Korolenko's stories with an enduring appeal.

Nicolai Lenin

Eulogistic Biography Of Bolshevik Premier

LENIN: THE MAN AND HIS WORK. By Albert Rhys Williams. Scott & Seltzer, New York.

As might be anticipated from his previous writings and speeches, Mr. Williams's biography of the Bolshevik Premier is frankly and enthusiastically eulogistic. He gives a biographical sketch of Lenin's life; and supplements it with anecdotes culled from ten months of personal association with the Bolshevik leaders in Moscow and Petrograd. He appends extracts from Arthur Ransome's "Russia In 1919" and from William Hard's account of Raymond Robin's experiences in Russia, which appeared in "The Metropolitan Magazine" last summer, and which will soon be published in book form by Harper & Bros. under the title "Raymond Robins's Own Story."

Whatever may be thought of Mr. Williams's political and economic views, no one can deny his ability to tell a good story. The incidents which he describes in the book are always interesting and often humorous. He gives a highly entertaining account of his own attempt to deliver a speech in Russian before a crowd of soldiers and workers while Lenin stood near and prompted him with occasional words. The touch of the good story teller also appears in his description of Lenin going to sleep in the midst of an exciting session of the Constituent Assembly, of the peasant who naively saluted the Bolshevik leeader as "Czar Lenin."

The best of Mr. Williams's book is to be found in the author's personal reminiscences. There is less to be said for his marshaling of expressions of conservative opinion favorable to Lenin. This form of propaganda has been extensively practiced and decidedly overdone by both sides in the Russian controversy. The "bankers" and "conservative journalists" who have approved of the Soviet form of government are just about counterbalanced by the "Socialists" and "labor unionists" who have found it the sum of all iniquities. Taken for all in all, however, Mr. Williams's biography is an excellent first-hand sketch of a powerful hand fascinating personality.

Yale Poetry

Freshness and Vigor in Book of College Verse

THE YALE BOOK OF STUDENT VERSE, 1910-1919. Yale University Press, New Haven.

There is good reason to be stirred by this volume of college verse. Twenty-seven poets are represented and their range of achievement is wide. A few—John Andrews, Stephen Vincent Benet and Archibald MacLeish, for instance—write like true poets, expertly, movingly. The average is naturally far lower. Echoes are many and new thought is rare. Yet there is a sincerity of effort and a fine artistic devotion throughout the whole volume that speaks more loudly of the estate of poetry in America than many poetry magazines.

Freshness of thought and the living line are especially noteworthy in the poems of Mr. Andrews and Mr Benet. "If I Were a Pirate" is as vigorous and appealing in content as it is ingenious verse. Coming from Mr. Andrews, '20, it is hard not to expect much in the future. As for Mr. Benet, we are quite won to him, even by comparison with his more famous elder brother, William Rose Benet, who, by the way, contributes an apologue to this volume. He has many accents, the Browning one most often, but always his own salty matter, and a range of technique rather appalling in a beginner.

The volume itself is one more delightful handful from the Yale University Press. It has a particularly ingratiating title page. The art of printing is not in danger in America as long as such classic beauty sets a standard.

G. P.

Linda Condon

Lack of Substance in Hergesheimer's Story

LINDA CONDON. By Joseph Hergesheimer. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Joseph Hergesheimer writes always with a verbal mastery that has won him a scrapbook of "exquisites," and his new novel, "Linda Condon," maintains the lofty standard. And yet we feel that Mr. Hergesheimer's latest product fails to measure up to "The Three Black Pennys," or even "Java Head" as a well-rounded story. Possibly the critical rhapsodies on his style have led him to neglect his function as a teller of tales.

"Linda Condon" is the story of a beautiful woman, whose career is traced from childhood to self-confessed middle age. Beauty is her passion, but her attitude is not creative, and therein lies her tragedy—a tragedy which is mellowed in the end by the realization that she has inspired a great artist to a masterpiece. Linda herself is not alluring. She is too cool, too objective. She has an air of sophisticated naïveté which makes one sympathize with the woman who wanted to "put you over my knee with your skirts up and paddle you." It is only in the final pages of the book that Mr. Hergesheimer succeeds in arousing compassion for his heroine.

In the attempt to explain the hereditary and social background from which Linda came the author has blurred the outline of his story. Mr. Hergesheimer is at his best when he confines himself to a single atmosphere, and his shifting about weakens the effect of the narrative. The episodes detailing Linda's life in the family of Moses Feldt add little to the story. We may forgive this lapse for the glimpses we get of Linda's mother, who is genuinely and pathetically human.

The Hergesheimer delicacy of touch and deftness of vocabulary pervades "Linda Condon," but we miss the fine sweep of "The Three Black Pennys" and the firmly molded structure of "Java Head." Mr. Hergesheimer has lost none of his extraordinary skill in handling literary tints; but he has been uncertain in his choice of subject and somewhat careless in the composition of "Linda Condon."

R. A. S.

With Soul on Fire

Social Unrest Theme Of Mr. Randall's Novel

WITH SOUL ON FIRE. By John Herman Randall. Brentano's, New York.

Like many novels which deal with the problem of social unrest Mr. Randall's work is propaganda rather than art. Frank Barr, a young soldier, comes back from France with a burning passion to apply his ideals of democracy in his daily life. First he horrifies his conventional parents by marrying a Jewish girl from the East Side. Then, after trying several experiments in social welfare work, he takes the side of the workers in a strike at his father's factory, thereby irreparably alienating the old gentleman and the stockholders of the corporation.

At this point Frank's perplexities are increased by the disappearance of his wife, who feels that he has become so wrapped up in his theories that he has lost his love for her. He follows her to Russia; and the book leaves him in the presumably congenial atmosphere of the Moscow Soviet.

Outside of the author's evident sincerity and occasional eloquence in expressing his ideals of social democracy there is little to be said for the merit of the novel. The characters possess little individuality; they are too obviously media for the expression of Mr. Randall's ideas. Those who like radical economic doctrines tempered by an admixture of Christian sentimentalism may overlook the technical defects of the story. But it is impossible not to feel that the author would be more at home in some other field of literature.

VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ,

Famous Spanish author, now in this country.

Western Democracy

Prof. Sloane Analyzes Its Aims and Ideals

THE POWERS AND AIMS OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY. By William Milligan Sloane. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

The word democracy has been so widely used in discussing national and international relations during the last few years that an exhaustive analysis of its origin, meaning and implications is eminently timely. After taking up the historical development of the democratic idea, Professor Sloane passes to the evolution of the modern state and concludes his work with a lengthy consideration of the problems raised by the peace.

The author is convinced that the achievement of the democratic ideal demands the fullest possible liberty for individual initiative. He looks with suspicion upon paternalism in any form; and solialism in all its forms, from the state socialism of Bismarck to the communism of Lenine, is anathema to him. Speaking of the Bolsheviki, he says:

"Criminals without a single redeeming quality, these monsters of infamy professed to be the harbingers of a new order on earth, of a world regenerate and just. In it there would be no war, because there would be no military on land or sea, no competition for markets or materials, because an irreducible minimum of production would absolutely preclude it; no colonies or imperialism, because of world-wide local self-determination, and as a corollary no patriotism or sense of nationality."

In his discussion of the league of nations and the possibility of establishing an enduring peace, Professor Sloane displays commanding erudition and a keen grasp of present day conditions. The work is perhaps the most elaborate treatment of the war and the problems of reconstruction from the standpoint of the scientific historian that has yet appeared in America.

Green Pea Pirates

THE GREEN PEA PIRATES. By Peter B. Kyne. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.

"The Green Pea Pirates" tells of the adventures of Captain Scraggs of the Maggie, a freighter of green vegetables, Gibney, his mate, McGaffey, the engineer, and Neil Halvarsen, able seaman. As the skipper was of choleric disposition, the happenings aboard the Maggie were of an exciting nature. The story will please readers who enjoy nautical yarns of a humorous character.

E. B. B.

Light Fiction

Romance and Melodrama In Novel by G. C. Shedd

IN THE SHADOW OF THE HILLS. By George C. Shedd. The Macaulay Company, New York.

This novel is about a young civil engineer who undertakes the construction of a dam in a district that is positively teeming with crooks. After a series of melodramatic events the hero outwits the villains and incidentally woos and wins a fair maiden of the vicinity. The book possesses all the requirements of the light novel. The plot is sufficiently complicated to hold the attention of the reader, and the characters are frankly black or white—no grays such as are common to most of u. The glorious ending—virtue overwhelming the powers of darkness, like St. George vanquishing the dragon—will always satisfy a sense of righteousness that is inherent in us all. The book is excellent as a substitute for an evening at the movies, but we do not recommend it as a literary achievement.

E. F. S.

War-time Essays

Havelock Ellis Shows Keen Grasp of Events

THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFLICT. By Havelock Ellis. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York and Boston.

It has been rather unkindly said that the essay is the refuge of the man who possesses no creative literary ability. This statement is perhaps more unkindly than untrue. The essay, especially the critical essay, in the hands of a dull writer may easily become an intolerable bore. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this general rule about the comparative inferiority of the essay form. One thinks immediately of Arnold and Pater, Nietzsche and Heine, Lichtenberger and Remy de Gourmont.

Mr. Havelock Ellis clearly belongs to the class of exceptions. He is a scholar of the best type; a scholar who does not obtrude his scholarship. His profound knowledge of history, sociology and anthropology imparts a quality of spacious grasp to his judgments of current events without impairing his clear, vigorous style. He is eminently erudite without being cumbersome.

In the essay that gives the book its title the author makes a sharp distinction between conflict and war. Contending that conflict is a desirable and essential element, while war is an avoidable excrescence in life, he takes issue equally with the militarist who believes that the inherent benefits of conflict can be realized only through war, and with the pacifist who wishes to eliminate conflict along with war. Mr. Ellis's reasoning suggests the late Professor James's argument in behalf of "a moral equivalent for war."

The author covers an extremely wide field, ranging from a discussion of the mind of woman to critical studies of Conrad and Baudelaire. He declares that women are more normal, less liable to the extremes of genius and idiocy than men. In his essays on the war Mr. Ellis is a consistent advocate of a peace by understanding rather than of Lloyd George's theory of "the knockout blow." In one keen and subtle piece of writing called "Vae Victoribus" the author points out the numerous historical instances in which victory has paved the way for the moral disintegration of a nation.

A Fairy Tale

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND. By Fannie Louise Aplohn. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

The old-fashioned fairy tale always has its attraction for children, and even grown-ups are sometimes known to yield to its seductive influence. At the worst, the witches and elves, dwarfs and giants who constitute the dramatis personæ of the orthodox fairy story are as credible and rather more interesting than the strange figures that often appear in that class of novels which is euphemistically described as "light summer fiction." The enchanted island is located somewhere conveniently remote from geographical restrictions, blessed with fine air and perpetual sunshine. The idyllic happiness of the country is disturbed when a wicked uncle deposes and kidnaps the rightful prince and ruler. The story then carries the young prince through a remarkable succession of fortunes and misfortunes, in which he comes into contact with all sorts of supernatural beings. Everything ends happily, of course; the prince finds a princess who is a worthy match for him in beauty and accomplishments, and the enchanted island settles back to its old state of reposeful bliss. The book is an excellent prescription for any one who wishes to spend an hour or two renewing his old faith in fairies.

W. H. C.

George Fox

Life of Quaker Leader By Dr. Rufus M. Jones

THE STORY OF GEORGE FOX. By Rufus M. Jones. The Macmillan Company, New York.

This biography of the founder of the Society of Friends, written especially for young people by one of the most eminent Quaker scholars in America, is well calculated to appeal to older readers as well. Dr. Jones gives a concise but full account of Fox's strenuous life, from the time when, as a young man, disgusted with the immorality and hypocrisy of the world about him, he dedicated himself to the preaching of a new faith until his death, with the phrase on his lips: "I am clear, I am fully clear." The author gives the following estimate of the salient point, in Fox's character:

"He knew and loved outdoor nature; he possessed great native gifts; he read the Bible until he almost knew it by heart; he had an honest, sincere soul; he was a born leader of men; he had a most remarkable experience of God; he was ready to go through fire and water to perform his duty, and he won the love of men in an extraordinary way, somewhat as did St. Francis of Assisi, more than four centuries earlier."

Throughout the book Dr. Jones is quite successful in bringing out Fox's strong and lovable traits, and in vindicating him from the slurs which Macaulay and others have cast upon him.

Historic Trees

THE HISTORIC TREES OF MASSACHUSETTS. By James Raymond Simmons. Small, Maynard & Co., Boston.

Every locality has its historic trees, and Massachusetts has an unusually large supply of them. From the days of the Pilgrim Fathers the Bay State commonwealth has habitually associated important events with trees near which they occurred. Mr. Simmons writes with fine enthusiasm and extensive knowledge of his subject, and the book, which is very handsomely prepared, is illustrated with photographs taken by the author.

The Indiana Poet

Description of Riley's Youth by Marcus Dickey

THE YOUTH OF JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY. By Marcus Dickey. Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis.

James Whitcomb Riley is perhaps the most distinctively provincial American poet. Born in a log cabin and brought up in the rough frontier environment that also produced Abraham Lincoln, he has always remained very closely in touch with the speech and thoughts of the plain folk of Indiana. His youth—the period of his life described in this book—exerted a peculiarly strong determining influence upon the development of his poetry.

Mr. Dickey gives a detailed account of Riley's life up to the time of the "Leonainie" hoax. This hoax was an interesting test of the credulity of the literary critics of the time. Riley wrote a poem entitled "Leonainie," and a newspaper editor, acting in collusion with him, brought it out with a grave explanation that it was a hitherto unpublished work of Edgar Allan Poe. Riley's own often expressed theory that fame is more essential to success than merit in literature as well as in business, was adequately verified by the event. "Leonainie" received a large amount of varied criticism, favorable and adverse, but generally based upon the assumption that Poe was the author of the poem. Naturally, when the hoax was exposed the pundits who had been so grievously taken in fell upon Riley savagely and declared that his career was forever blasted. But here, as in their acceptance of Poe's authorship of "Leonainie," they were decidedly mistaken.

This incident is typical of the carefree, exuberant spirit which characterized Riley throughout his life and made him one of the most lovable of American poets. Mr. Dickey has made excellent use of the correspondence and other materials bearing upon Riley's life to which he has been given access. The author describes the poet's boyhood home and his experiences at school; he also follows Riley in the varied occupations which he undertook before he devoted himself entirely to writing. The numerous warm admirers of the Indiana poet should welcome this authoritative and interesting story of an important formative period of his life.